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ABSTRACT

A common mistake made by job seekers is to discuss salary before receiving a job offer. This paper offers two basic rules for discussing compensation: (1) Do not mention salary in an interview if the employer does not broach the subject; and (2) when negotiating a pay rate, never give the first figure. Although a job's salary is usually paramount in the prospective employee's mind, employers want to know what the interviewee can do for the company, not what the company can do for the applicant. When an applicant asks about salary or benefits, the employer may believe that the job seeker is interested in the money first and the position last. Once a job is tendered, then the new employee may discuss salary. If the employer asks what the employee's salary requirements are, the employee should immediately inquire as to what the position pays. If the employer persists in hearing a figure first, then the employee must be prepared to list a salary range: which means he or she must have researched what this type of position pays. The paper offers various scenarios to foster critical thinking during salary negotiations. (RJM)

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Counseling Job Hunters in Salary Negotiation Tactics

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"How much does this job pay?" is a job hunter's usual first question during an interview. This is Item Number One on the list of employer turn offs. Item number two in employer turn offs is unrealistic salary expectations. In other words, interviewed people may say that they want ten dollars an hour while in reality, the job might only pay half that. When is an appropriate time and way to bring up salary? Here are some thoughts and ideas on how to counsel and train people for this important subject.

It is understandable that salaries are the first thing on a job seeker's minds. After all, we need money to buy food and clothes and whatever. However, this is the last thing on an employer's mind. The employer's first concern is finding someone who has the appearance, dependability, and skills to do the job. Do you see the contrast? The employer wants someone to fill their needs. The job hunter wants a job - money - to fill their needs. So, the approach is from whose side?

Obviously, we will approach this from the employer's perspective. They are the ones in control of the job and pay check. Job hunters must always learn to put the employer's interests first until a job offer is tendered.

This is not as easy as it sounds. For some job seekers, their whole lives may depend on getting a job. Nevertheless, bringing up pay at the wrong time, the wrong place, and the

wrong way could be the reason for the rejection.

What follows are two rules that will greatly simplify salary negotiation. In fact, these two rules harness most salary questions and situations.

Rule One - Do not bring up the salary in an interview. If the employer does not bring it up, the job hunter should not bring it up.

At this point, job hunters may say, "But I need to know how much the job pays!" That is correct. Also, job hunters say, "But I need to know how much the job pays before I start the job!" Equally correct. "But if I need to know how much the job pays and I need to know how much the job pays before I start, when do I bring the salary up?"

Wait for the job offer. That is right. The job hunter should wait until the employer says something like, "You have the job," or "We would like to offer you the job," or "When can you start?"

The first thing to do is to pin the employer down and establish that this is indeed an offer. The job hunter needs to ask "Are you offering me the position?" The employer will answer, if true, "That is right." Now you can discuss the salary.

Questions: Why wait until this point, why not ask about salary in an interview when the opportunity presents itself to ask questions? The reason: A job hunter needs to invest 100 percent of their time, effort, and energy to getting to the point of an offer. In other words, their attitude always must be, "Here is what I can do for you, the employer."

Anytime a job seeker asks about salary and benefits, this is time and attention on what the company can do for them, the job seeker. It takes away from the time, effort, and energy that are better directed at getting the offer.

Once a job hunter earns an offer, it is now up to the employer to sell the company to the prospective employee. This will be in the salary and benefit package. But, I emphasize, the job hunter must EARN their way to this point in the hiring process.

Here is a more practical explanation and question. What good is it in knowing the salary and benefit package if a job offer is not tendered? The answer: It is no good at all. It is like the fish that got away.

The following is a true story. A job hunter came to a job search training instruction session with stars in their eyes. They had just had an interview for their dream job at a hospital. They showed off a several page pamphlet on the salary and benefit package and talked, glowingly, about how the great position pay and benefits.

In reality, the job hunter needed to put the pamphlet away and continue with the job search until they received an offer from the hospital. Sure enough, several days later, much to their dismay, they received a rejection letter. All that was left to talk about was how big the fish was and how nice it would have been.

Additionally, a person needs to ask about the salary when a job offer is tendered because this is vital personal and professional information. Too many tender-hearted job seekers are too shy and/or afraid to ask about the pay for fear that the employer will pull the job offer away from them. This is an unfounded fear.

Until a job offer is tendered, there is no commitment by an employer to hire this person. Bringing up the salary at the wrong time, in the wrong place, and in the wrong way may cause the employer to believe that the job seeker is interested in the money first and the position last.

After an offer is tendered, there is commitment by an employer to a person. There has been some careful thought and a decision making process. The employer is not going to pull the job offer back just because a person wants to know what the salary will be. They understand that a person does really have a need and a right to know what the pay will be.

What if there is a job offered or what if the employer brings up a salary question in an interview without a job offer? In either case, there is Rule Number Two in salary negotiation is: Never give the first figure.

In football, they say there are three things can happen when the ball is in the air and two of them are bad. The good thing that happens is a reception. The two bad things are an interception or an incomplection. In salary discussions, there are three things that can happen by giving the first figure and two of them are bad. The one good thing that can happen is that a person can be right on the salary range or figure. The two bad things that can happen are being too high or too low.

Bad Thing One is if a given figure is too high, the employer may assume that the job hunter might not be happy at this place of business as they may be expecting more pay and to lower their expectations may cause dissatisfaction.

Bad Thing Two is being too low. This could be a confidence issue. Employers may wonder, "Is this how the job seeker perceives your abilities to do the job? Will they only do the minimum to get by, as opposed to the maximum of their capabilities?"

So what is the actual answer to the question, "What is your salary expectation?" The appropriate response is to answer a question with a question and ask, "How much does this position pay?" At this point, many employers will give their range or figure and the job

hunter does not need to worry about giving a figure that is too high or too low.

What if an employer knows salary negotiation tactics and looks back at a job hunter and says, "I asked you first. How much pay are you expecting?" Obviously, this is not a ping-pong game so the job seeker needs a response. The response comes from prior preparation and research to discover a ball park figure or range for the salary.

This research can be done in the library with such books as: The Occupational Outlook Handbook, the Enhanced Guide for Occupational Exploration, The Professional Careers Series, Careers Without College Series, The Encyclopedia of Careers and Vocational Guidance, and many other fine books. A reference librarian is available for assistance. Merely explain the needed salary information and the librarian can steer a job seeker to the appropriate resources.

Also, federal and state employment services offices keep labor market information and statistics, which include salary surveys. Call your local or state office of the Employment Services or the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Armed with this information, when faced with the "I asked you first," situation, the response is, "According to my research, I have found the salary range to between _____ and _____." To which the employer may agree that the information is accurate and that is within their range. At this point, a job hunter knows what to expect.

However, the employer may not agree and comment about that the range is too high for their company. Local prevailing wages usually pay less than inflated national averages. Here the job hunter's response is, "As I said that is what my research shows but that is not

necessarily my range. What did you have in mind?" Here is where an employer probably will offer their starting pay. If not, at least a job hunter has an idea that the pay will be lower than their researched figure.

Now, Critical Thinking Skills Time.

Example A. A job seeker is filling out an application form and the question on the application is "Minimum starting salary expected?" How to answer? Follow Rule 2: Do not give the first figure. Merely write in the blank with "Will Discuss in Interview."

When called to the interview and the employer asks for clarification for this question, such as, "On the application's salary question, you wrote 'Will Discuss in Interview.' What is your salary requirement?" Follow Rule One. Ask "How much does this position pay?" After all, the employer brought the subject up. And, if need be, use the salary research and information.

Another Critical Thinking Skills Problem.

Example B. A job seeker is reading a want ad in the paper or sees a job posting for a position they want. The pay figure or range is listed in the want ad or posting. The job seeker is filling out an application or the question comes up in an interview, "Salary expected?" or a derivative. Now how should the job seeker answer the question?

The answer is: The job seeker should mirror the want ad's salary figure or range. This follows Rule 2 because the company gave the first figure. To write "Will Discuss" could count against a job seeker as an employer could think "I listed what the salary is. Maybe they want more."

Finally, on the subject of asking about future raises or benefits, job hunters should

follow Rule One. Establish the certainty of the job offer. Make sure you are on firm footing before attempting to climb higher.

To close, the proper attitude is putting the employer and their needs first. In business as in life, what goes around comes around. When a job seeker helps an employer get what they want and puts their interests first, usually the job seeker gets what they want. In this case, paid employment.